LAST NIGHT IN DEATH HOUSE.

Experiences as Related by Roland B. Molineux, Who Was Released.

Lieutenant Charles Becker, formerly of the New York police force, was electrocuted a few days ago in the death chamber at Sing Sing prison. Roland B. Molineux was tried for murder, convicted and spent several months in the death house, an occupant of one of the little cells where Becker spent his final hours of life. Molineux wrote of his experiences there in a book, "The Room With the Little Door," published by Dillingham. He gives this description of a man's last day and night; the few remaining hours before the little door opens to admit him to the execution chamber:

There are unwritten laws and canons for all important occurrences in the death chamber. I do not mean the prison rules; but the way "we" have of doing things. For instance, the new arrival, after he has passed through all formalities at the officials' hands, and they are many, is initiated by "us" on the first night passed in our society.

This is an ancient and honorable custom, and like all initiations, a secret. These fixed ceremonies occur all through his long and brutal life in the death chamber. Long, for even a short stay in it makes him old; brutal, because his punishment is—death. Is that not enough? And to add thereto years of solitary confinement is to kill him not once, but over and over again. The system is all wrong. Oh, the years in the death chamber! The loneliness, the quiet! Hell must be a quiet place.

When at last it is drawing to a close, when the governor has refused to interfere, the officials proceed in this manner: On Saturday the "fortunate one" on stepping from his bath is ordered into a new cell—the one next to the "little door" leading to the execution chamber. Here he receives everything new; new bedding, new clothes from head to foot, and then his knickknacks, pipe, tobacco, boxes, books, and the package of letters from home, ragged and blurred from reading and re-reading; all have been carefully searched. He receives something else, for this change in itself is his notice that one week from the following Monday he will be moved again. No questions are ever asked; he has seen it all before; but should he ask, the only reply will be "I don't know."

From that moment a certain unwritten etiquette among us is never violated. His own way in everything, as far as we can possibly comprehend it, is our law. Does he ask for a song or story, his demand is acquiesced with at once. Will he play checkers? He may choose his opponent, and he will always win. We send him our oranges, the top layer from the box of cigars one has purchased. We do anything, everything, we can to please him. Has there been a quarrel between him and another, it is completely forgotten. On his part he must make the ghastly regulation jokes during the week. These are two in number, one with the keeper about the new suit of clothes: "I suppose you will be wearing this week after next." Number two is with the barber: "Don't forget to cut my hair short on top." From now on the "death watch" (two keepers) sits in front of his cage every night. During this week occurs the greatest horror we are called upon to bear, i. e., to hear the last farewells of our companion to mother, wife, sister, or child. While listening to their cries we anticipate the agony in store for those we love. My heart bleeds when I remember what I heard in the death chamber. It is unspeakable. I cannot write of it.

Then comes the last night. Everything must be done very exactly now. Our code prescribes for everything; nothing must be omitted, no custom may be violated. The early evening passes as usual. Generally he asks for songs, perhaps he will sing one himself. That is as it may be. But at midnight the last rites among us of the death chamber take place. The keeper comes to my cell carrying, perhaps, the little paper box my departing friend has kept his tobacco in so long; one that he made and decorated himself.

"Keep that to remember me by." I hear from the direction of the little door.

"Thank you," I reply.

"Good-bye. I hope you have luck and get out," is the next part of the ritual.

I must respond, "Thank you. Goodbye, and God bless you."

This is repeated with each one separately. He gives everything away, books, pipe, all. For six months he has been turning over in his mind just what treasure each of his companions shall receive when the last night comes. The responses never vary. They are now as they were ten years ago; they will be the same twenty years from now if that hell on earth is still in existence.

No one speaks to him or to any one else after that. He is reading and re-reading each of those letters for the last time and destroying them. We hear him tearing them up one by one. "Swish, swish, swish." Then it is quiet, very quiet in the death chamber. I am not sleepy; the other fellows do not seem to be sleepy. They are reading. I sit up and write this; tomorrow I will write the other half. . . . .

I have often read in the newspapers the supposed meal partaken of by the departing guest "furnished from the warden's table." No newspaper reporter seems to be able to resist a description of the last breakfast, and no two papers ever publish the same one. Did the wretch gorge himself to the extent indicated, indigestion and not electricity would carry him off, and justice would be cheated. No, he is not even stimulated to the extent of a cup of coffee, and for a good reason; a full stomach is not a good conductor. You will read that "the man was indifferent." I will tell you he was glad to go. "That he made no trouble." Why should he? "Our horror," how we are affected by our companion's death, is fully portrayed. As a matter of fact, we envy him. Anything, everything is better than existence in the death chamber.

During the night, if you have lain awake, and one has been known to be so foolish, you may have felt a very slight vibration, perhaps it was imagination; perhaps it is the dynamo. If you have slept, and do not hear the death watch draw down the curtains in front of all the cells when the night outside turns gray, you will surely be awakened by the noise of many feet. It is the priests who have entered. Their ordinary shoes on the flagging of the corridor sound like thunder, thunder moving away. Now it subsides to the murmuring of Latin prayers. As you lie in your cell (the drawn curtains make it resemble a little box) wike awake, you know that the last confession is being made, the last sacrament is being administered. This is another reason why no breakfast is given to the traveler. I saw it all one morning; the curtain was not quite down to the floor. I made myself as flat as possible. I saw the priest bless and kiss him; hold up the cross before his eyes; bid him have faith, and then back out of the cell. "He," who is soon to be "it" followed. Then I heard the procession march rapidly into the next room. "Bang!" said the hungry little door as it closed.

What happens in there, and how it felt three minutes later, I cannot tell you; but I came very near finding out. Will you believe me that this day is a long one? You fellows outside can do much to divert the mind from disagreeable thoughts; we have breakfast, and sit down to wonder which one of us will be the next to go.

A CURIOUS SITUATION.

Plenty of Water, But There Were No Boats.

When in a spirit of tame adventure I started out to make an inland voyage down the Mississippi from St. Paul to New Orleans, says W. A. Aylward in Harper's, the first fact that confronted me was that it could not be done; that the traffic on the extreme upper river was of such a fugitive and excursion-like nature that it disappeared absolutely with the first hint of coming autumn.

There was the river in its best season, placidly reflecting the rich color of a glorious September day. There was plenty of water, the channel was clear, but as a steamboat man lugubriously remarked, "It takes something more than water to run a steamboat." And, that something being lacking, the boats had stopped. Along the bank they lay with their stacks canvassed over against the still far-off winter snows, hauled clear of the ice that would gather later, and ready for their long sleep.

Well might the inhospitable signs on the raised stages have read "Keep Off the River," for it was strangely deserted, and as I made my way from point to point in stuffy, overheated trains no human life disturbed its surface for hundreds of miles save an occasional pearl-fisher, a ferryboat crawling crab-fashion from shore to shore, or perhaps an excursion barge making its way to winter quarters after a season of "exclusive dances" at fifty cents a head.

It was significant, too, that the towboat which had the barge in its charge was a powerful and well-known "raft-boat" whose trade had disappeared with the rest, and the thrilling sight of a million or so logs floating to a destination a thousand miles away "as peacefully as though each log had a propeller and rudder of its own" is one thing more that has become a river tradition.

The Right Husband.

"So you think Katherine made a very suitable match?"

"Yes, indeed, you know what a nervous, excitable girl she was. Well she married a composer."—Boston Transcript.

ELECTRICITY.

Some Facts About This Wonderful and Puzzling Medium.

Here are some of the known facts about electricity that will enable those who know nothing about it to understand how it behaves. It must be understood that no one knows what electricity is. Only through its behavior can we arrive at an idea of its nature. The following facts are condensed from an article in the Electrical Experimenter:

All substances, from the heaviest metals to the lighest gases, are electric, but they differ widely in their electric qualities. Electricity is called positive when it exists or is excited in any body in an amount in excess of the amount natural to that body. It is called negative when it exists or is excited in any body in an amount which is less than the amount natural to that body. All electrical phenomena in nature depend upon the tendency of electricity to find an equilibrium between its positive and negative states.

Electricity resides in all substances and is, perhaps, an essential ingredient of their conditions, so every change in their state, whether from heat to cold or from cold to heat, from a state of rest to a state of motion, from solid to liquid or to aeriform, or vice versa, or whether substances combine chemically or are chemically separated—in every change the electrical equilibrium is disturbed, and in proportion to the degree of disturbance is the force exerted by electricity to resume its balance.

Electricity seeks to gain its equilibrium by passing through substances that are favorable to its diffusion. These are called conducting or nonconducting, according as they favor or oppose the passage of the electrical current.

Among the conductors are metals, charcoal, animal fluids, water, vegetable and animal bodies, flame, smoke and vapor. Among the nonconductors—also called insulators—are rust, oils, phosphorus, lime, chalk, rubber, camphor, marble, porcelain, dry gases and air, wood, silk, glass, transparent stones, wax and amber. Some of these become conductors when wet.

When electricity in considerable force, seeking its equilibrium, meets with insulating bodies intense heat and light are produced, in the evolution of which the electric force becomes expended. When the electric force is checked in its course by an insulator a spark is emitted if the current be strong. When currents pass toward each other along wires at the ends of which charcoal points are placed and these ends remain in contact, the electrical communication is uninterrupted and no light is emitted, but the instant the charcoal points are separated a layer of dry air, a nonconductor, is interposed, and the electricity is forcing its way through that nonconductor evolves intense heat and brilliant light. Such is an arc light.

The President's Sleep.

It is sleep, plenty of it, that Dr. Grayson believes must, in the main, constitute Woodrow Wilson's vacation.

"Eight hours' sleep is enough, I'll admit for most mature persons," says Dr. Grayson, "but not for the president. Mr. Wilson uses up so much vitality, such a tremendous amount of nerves and mental energy, during the day that it takes much more than the ordinary amount of sleep for him to recuperate in. Three nights running in which he does not get his full quota of rest means a depleted president.

"But how he does sleep when he sleeps! I never saw such a good sleeper! But he does that as he does everything else—hard, hard, hard!

"And we have to play him hard on vacation or he is thinking about the job. Woodrow Wilson's mind has got to be full of something and if it isn't filled with play, it is going to crowd in enough hard thinking to pad out all the empty corners.

"I know sometimes when I am playing golf with him—and I generally play with him myself only because then I know he won't be talking business and will consequently be giving his mind and body the complete relaxation it must needs have—he will be thinking about something he has been working on and will make a bad stroke.

"'What's the matter with me, doctor?' he will say. 'I can't play today at all.' 'No,' I will reply, 'of course you can't with your mind in Europe and your body in New Hampshire!' And back he'll come to the links with a jerk!"—From Cornish, N. H., letter to Boston Advertiser.

Why He Laughed.

Wasn't that funny story you laughed at very old?"

"Yes. But the man who told it was so important and dignified that his condescension in telling any kind of a funny story struck me as highly amusing."—Washington Star.